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ABSTRACT

This survey of 406 educators attending the 1973 summer session at Northern Illinois University sought to determine educators' familiarity with behavior modification, including the nature of their exposure to it and the extent to which they have integrated it into their own behavior. The survey also sought subjects' opinion of the value of being trained to use behavior modification techniques, of the ethics of managing behavior, and of the applicability of behavior modification under the present educational environment. Incidence of familiarity with behavior modification programs was high. Most of the subjects were exposed to behavior modification in college and had integrated it into their own behavioral repertoire. Most of the educators surveyed believed that it would be valuable to be trained in the use of behavior modification techniques in order to improve student-teacher interaction. They also regarded behavioral management as ethical, and many saw it as an effective tool in group control and as applicable to education under present conditions. (Author/HMD)

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TEACHERS AND BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Introduction

Behavior modification has been in the ascendancy in recent years. Its most recent history of use has been with the emotionally disturbed, the mentally handicapped, and with those in penal institutions. Its adaptation to education has been somewhat slower primarily because the announced purpose of the educational institution is not corrective. In many instances, however, the facts would indicate otherwise and, therefore, behavior modification is becoming of increased interest to educators.

Behavior modification has as its objective the shaping of behavior in a particular setting utilizing proper contingencies of reinforcement. Its rationale is found in the principle of operant conditioning promulgated by B. F. Skinner. The principle of operant conditioning prescribes the circumstances under which behavior is shaped. Broadly speaking it states that the probability of certain operants (i.e. behaviors) being replicated is increased by the application of appropriate reinforcement stimuli (primarily positive) shortly after it occurs. The proper application of the principle requires an operant analysis of the setting, the behavior, and its consequences. Essentially it is the application of the notion that behavior is shaped and maintained by its consequences and that we need only to alter the consequences so that the behaviors we want to shape are more effectively reinforced.

As an operant technique, behavior modification has had and is having a controversial career. This is due in part to the controversy surrounding Skinner and his writings (e.g. Beyond Freedom and Dignity), but mostly because it is viewed as having the potential for depriving the individual of his right to plan and carry out the activities of hiw own life. This view holds that operant techniques provide the means for the establishment of an Orwellian society in which the inhabitants are ultimately regimented into behavioral patterns directed by a small group of controllers.

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This survey of 406 educators attending the 1973 summer session at Northern Illinois University sought to determine educator familiarity with behavior modification, including the nature of their exposure to it and the extent to which they have integrated it into their own behavioral repertory. It also sought their opinion of the value of being trained to use behavior modification techniques and of the ethics of managing behavior. Finally it sought their opinion of the applicability of behavior modification under present conditions in education.

These educators were teachers and administrators in the elementary, middle, and secondary schools located primarily in the northern part of Illinois which is one of the fastest growing population areas of the country. In a population somewhat more male (226) than female (180) the breakdown by position was 111 elementary school teachers (kindergarten through fifth grade), 93 middle school teachers (grades six, seven, and eight), 151 secondary school teachers (nine through twelve) of which 56 taught English and social studies, 39 mathematics and science, and 56 were teachers of language, art, industrial arts, home economics, business and physical education. Forty-nine of the educators surveyed were in some sort of administrative position in the schools. In terms of teaching experience they were a relatively young group. Two-hundred eighty-two had taught five or less years, 83 had taught six to ten years, 31 had taught eleven to twenty years, and only six indicated over twenty years of teaching experience. The highest degree held by the majority (almost sixty-nine per cent) was either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science in Education. Seventeen per cent held the Master of Arts or Master of Science in Education degrees.

The limitations of this survey are obvious. The sample is not randomized and, therefore, cannot be said to be totally representative of all educator opinion on this subject. It is, however, a fairly large sample with a fairly even distribution by position in a population area of significance in this country and this lends credence to its results. The treatment of the data was by per cent and chi square primarily

according to sex, experience, degree and position. It is reported in tabular and narrative form.

Findings

Most of the educators in this survey indicated (Table I) that they were familiar with the techniques used by professionals in behavior modification with the incidence of knowledge being significantly greater among females, secondary English and social studies teachers, and elementary and middle school teachers. Educator exposure to

TABLE I
EDUCATOR FAMILIARITY WITH TECHNIQUES USED BY PROFESSIONALS IN BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROGRAMS

	N	%
Yes	285	70.2
No	116	28.6
No Response	5	1.2
Total	406	100.0

Sex	Yes	No
Male	147(65.6%)	77(34.4%)
Female	138(78.0%)	39(22.0%)

$x^2 = 6.73641$ df = 1
$P < .01$

Position	Yes	No
Elementary-Middle School	160(79.2%)	42(20.8%)
Secondary	85(56.7%)	65(43.3%)

$x^2 = 19.62074$ df = 1
$P < .01$

Position	Yes	No
Elementary	94(84.7%)	17(15.3%)
Middle	66(72.5%)	25(27.5%)

$x^2 = 3.77977$ df = 1
$P < .10$

Position	Yes	No
English-Social Studies	38(67.9%)	18(32.1%)
Mathematics-Science	18(47.4%)	20(52.6%)
Other	29(51.8%)	27(48.2%)

$x^2 = 4.73710$ df = 2
$P < .10$

behavior modification was primarily in the classroom and through reading. The influence of this exposure has led most of them to tentative exploration. Ninety per cent felt that certain of their responses to pupils had resulted in a modification of the students behavior and apparently a decided portion of them, as shown on Table II, felt that training in the use of behavior modification techniques would be a valuable

means for improving daily student-teacher interaction. This was significantly so for elementary and middle school teachers.

TABLE II
EDUCATOR OPINION OF THE VALUE OF BEING TRAINED TO USE BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION TECHNIQUES AS A MEANS FOR IMPROVING STUDENT TEACHER INTERACTION

	N	%
Yes	291	71.7
No	22	5.4
Undecided	66	16.3
No Response	27	6.7
Total	406	100.0

Position	Yes	No	Undecided
Elementary-Middle School	157(80.5%)	8(4.1%)	30(15.4%)
Secondary	94(68.6%)	12(8.8%)	31(22.6%)

$x^2 = 6.70113$ df = 2
$P < .05$

The ethics of behavioral management is a question of long standing significance and one which has created the greatest storm of controversy. The positions taken range from the point of view that it is absolutely unethical to involve oneself in any way in the deliberate business of modifying human behavior to the diametrically opposed position that the management of behavior is ethical, with little regard for the techniques employed. Surprisingly, the educators in this survey overwhelmingly favored the latter position. Table III shows that almost eighty-five per cent of them held the opinion that it was ethical to manage behavior regardless of the techniques employed. There was some reservation on the part of the English and social studies teachers at the secondary level but for the greater majority there was none. On the face

TABLE III
EDUCATOR OPINION OF THE ETHICS OF MANAGING BEHAVIOR REGARDLESS OF THE TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED

	N	%
Yes	344	84.7
No	17	4.2
Undecided	35	8.6
No Response	10	2.5
Total	406	100.0

Position	Yes	No	Undecided
English-Social Studies	43(76.8%)	1(1.8%)	12(21.4%)
Mathematics-Science	33(89.2%)	3(8.1%)	1(2.7%)
Other	48(85.7%)	2(3.6%)	6(10.7%)

$x^2 = 9.15538$ df = 4
$P < .10$

of it this is a disturbing outcome particularly if one takes into consideration that the educator's power over the student in school is almost complete and virtually irrevocable. The mitigating circumstance, however, is that this inquiry was within the context of more complete survey on operant conditioning in which virtually all of the respondents related positive techniques to behavioral management. However, that does not settle the ethics question. The institutions of our society, education in particular, will have to confront it. Behavior modification has been proven to be a viable and extremely effective technique for the manipulation and alteration of human behavior. Any adoption of it by the schools must assure its ethical use - that is, without depriving the student of his right, in a free society, to pursue certain individual goals. Is this possible? It is if educators fully understand the function of education in a free society. Otherwise, the forebodings of its opponents may be fulfilled.

Being willing to accept behavioral management on an ethical basis, however, does not guarantee that behavior modification as an operant technique will work within the present educational establishment. In order to explore the possibility that educators might find operant techniques unacceptable because they felt that conditions in education make them inapplicable queries were made into their attitudes concerning their effectiveness in controlling groups and their applicability under present conditions

of education. In both instances the larger percentage affirmed these notions with some reservation as shown on Tables IV and V. A significantly higher percentage of administrators than teachers felt that operant techniques were applicable in the present educational setting. It would appear that educators as a group are ready psychologically to accept behavior modification within the educational realm so long as it can be utilized effectively.

TABLE IV
EDUCATOR OPINION OF USING OPERANT TECHNIQUES
TO CONTROL GROUP BEHAVIOR AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

	N	%
Yes	228	56.2
No	12	3.0
Undecided	90	22.2
No Response	76	18.7
Total	406	100.0

TABLE V
EDUCATOR OPINION OF THE APPLICABILITY
OF OPERANT TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING BEHAVIOR
UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS OF EDUCATION

	N	%
Yes	187	46.1
No	45	11.1
Undecided	102	25.1
No Response	72	17.7
Total	406	100.0

Position	Yes	No	Undecided
Administrators	28(73.7%)	4(10.5%)	6(15.8%)
Teachers	159(53.7%)	41(13.9%)	96(32.4%)

$x^2 = 5.72912$ df = 2
$P < .10$

Sometimes the comments made in conjunction with surveys of this type are as enlightening as the objective responses are in toto. In this case they were. A sampling of these comments follows:

> "My answers are pragmatic. I accept the theories and the practice of behavior modification and operant conditioning but I think it is a hell of a way to live, really." (a secondary English teacher)

> "I totally disapprove of most uses of behavior modification. In most cases it allows the teacher to remain distant from students-humanistic, involved, loving relations cause the greatest possible change." (a junior high science teacher)

"We all manipulate. If behavior mod can be used for setting up situations in which people can have freedom to develop their potential through choice then I agree with its utilization. If it's used for strict regimentation it is ethically and morally reprehensible." (a secondary social studies teacher)

"Managing of behavior could be unethical depending on the technique used. I also feel that different techniques need to be used with individual children. Some might need behavior mod-others not. No one approach is right for all children." (an upper elementary mathematics and reading teacher)

"I think all teachers should take a behavior mod course before graduating and those already in the field should be required to take one as a refresher course. I found it to be so useful I wished I had had this information much earlier in my teaching career." (a first grade teacher with over twenty years experience)

Summary

In this survey, incidence of educator familiarity with the techniques used by professionals in behavior modification programs was high. This knowledge came about primarily through their college class work and to some extent it had been integrated into their own behavioral repertoire. Most of the educators in this survey believed that it would be valuable to be trained in the use of behavior modification techniques in order to improve student-teacher interaction. They also regarded behavioral management as ethical and many saw it as effective in group control and applicable to education under present conditions.

Concluding Commentary

Harassed as they are with a whole range of problems related to pupil background and ability, schools seek ways of controlling and predicting behavior which will allow them to carry out what society regards as their manifest task, that of educating its youth. Therefore, the appeal of operant techniques such as behavior modification is real. Essentially it says to the educator that here is a way that you can improve the level of student performance individually and en masse in a more predictable way than you have ever been able to do in the past. You need only adapt it to the educational setting. This is a tempting prospect in an institution which must constantly deal

with problems of motivation and control; and one that by its very nature appeals to the strong strain of pragmatism that exists in this society. Educators as a group are not immune to this proposal. They must cope on a day to day basis with some very difficult learning and behavioral problems and they seek effective and efficient ways of dealing with them. They are also under pressure to show results; and the advent and development of a technology of behavior which shows promise of providing a higher level of success and therefore more satisfaction will not escape their attention.

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